

*Hon John Sherman*

SPEECH

OF

MR. M. P. GENTRY, OF TENNESSEE,

ON THE OREGON QUESTION.

*Delivered in the House of Representatives, U. S., February 5, 1846.*

The House having under consideration the joint resolution reported by the Committee on Foreign Affairs, directing the President to give notice to Great Britain that the United States will terminate the convention between the two Governments, providing for the joint right of trade in Oregon territory, at the expiration of twelve months—

Mr. GENTRY having obtained the floor, said—

Mr. CHAIRMAN: This House has placed itself in a most extraordinary attitude. On yesterday or the day before it passed a resolution requesting the President of the United States "to communicate all correspondence which has passed between the Government of Great Britain and this Government, or by or between any of the officers of said Governments in relation to the country west of the Rocky mountains since the last annual message of the President to this House." If the adoption of that resolution by the House meant any thing, it meant that the representatives of the people on this floor believed that, before they were called upon to vote upon this great question, they were entitled to know all that had transpired between the Government of Great Britain and this Government in relation to the difficulties between the two nations since the President communicated his annual message at the beginning of the present session of Congress. But what have we seen this morning? This House, which but yesterday passed the resolution to which I have referred, has this morning passed the resolution that all debate upon the great question before it shall cease on Monday next, and that the committee shall then proceed to vote upon the resolution reported by the Committee on Foreign Affairs, and upon the various amendments which have been offered! I was *surprised* to witness the efforts made by the leaders of the Administration party to defeat the resolution of inquiry which was passed by the House, and was pleased to see those efforts unsuccessful. I have witnessed with regret their efforts this morning to pass the resolution to terminate debate, and bring the House to a vote on Monday, and was *astonished* to see those efforts successful. Has the House heard from the President in reply to its resolution? Has he responded to the important inquiry? Is this House in possession of the facts which, by its inquiry, it declared to be necessary to guide its conclusion upon the question before the committee? Does this House know all that has transpired between the two Governments? Is it informed of the exact posture of our present relations with England? Is it prepared to act blindfolded, to take a leap in the dark, on a question which involves the highest interests of the country—a question admitted on both sides of the argument to involve the issues of peace and war? I say on both sides of the argument. For while, on the one hand, it is contended, that to pass this resolution is the most effectual mode of securing a speedy and peaceful adjustment of the controversy with England; on the other, it is urged, with equal earnestness, that its tendency will be to promote war. All, then, agree that the question pending before this committee is fraught, for good or evil, with the most momentous consequences. Ought we not, then, to have all of the facts of the case before us, before we are required either to speak or vote upon it? I regret the necessity which compels me to speak in the absence of facts necessary to a proper understanding of the present relations of our Government with England, and which I conceive I have a right to know.

I was much astonished, in the early part of this debate, to hear the distinguished chairman of the Committee on Foreign Affairs (Mr. C. J. INGERSOLL) declare, in the most positive and unqualified manner, that no correspondence had taken place between



the two Governments since that communicated to Congress at the beginning of the present session. I believed then that the gentleman was mistaken. I believe so now. But the gentleman made the declaration most emphatically, and took upon himself the responsibility of doing so. If he had not made that declaration so positively and unqualifiedly, I would have introduced a resolution, at an early period of this debate, calling on the President to communicate to this House any correspondence which might have taken place between the two Governments; but I felt that it would not be respectful to the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. C. J. INGERSOLL) then to do so. The gentleman from Vermont, (Mr. COLLAMER,) in introducing the resolution which the House adopted on the day before yesterday, anticipated me in a purpose which I intended to execute. I repeat my conviction, that the chairman of the Committee on Foreign Affairs was mistaken, when he made the declaration to which I have referred; and he is mistaken now, if he thinks there has been no correspondence between the two Governments since that communicated by the President at the beginning of the present session of Congress. Such a conclusion is at war alike with the suggestions of reason and of common sense. It is *impossible* that nothing other than that which has been communicated to this House has transpired between the authorities of this Government and that of Great Britain. To suppose so is to suppose that the Executive branch of this Government is altogether unmindful or regardless of the duties which it owes to the American people; and that the British Government is entirely indifferent as to the question of peace or war, as between herself and this nation. The supporters of the Administration on this floor have labored most strenuously to convince the House that to give notice to England in the form proposed by the resolution reported by the committee on Foreign Affairs, now under consideration, of the abrogation of the treaty of 1818, will not, cannot, produce war; and they have taxed their talents—they have brought into requisition all their eloquence, to present to our view, in the most striking lights, the powerful reasons, the considerations of State policy, which operate to make it pre-eminently the interest of England to maintain peace with the United States. I, in part, grant their conclusions; I admit the force of their reasoning; I admit that England desires peace with the United States; I admit that it is pre-eminently her interest to maintain peace with us. I maintain, however, that it is equally our interest to maintain peace with England. I hope, for the interest of my country, that we will not presume too much upon the universally admitted fact, that it is her interest to maintain friendly relations with us. I hope that we will not forget to remember (and if we are wise we will not forget) that England may not, cannot, will not, dare not, attempt to preserve and maintain any or all of her domestic interests by sacrificing her national honor—by disgracefully lowering her proud crest, or in any way compromising her high and commanding position among the nations of the world.

If, however, it be true, as all admit, that England is so very desirous to maintain peace with us, is it not to be presumed that Sir Robert Peel, charged as he is with all the interests of that great nation, would, upon the reception in England of such a message as the President communicated to Congress at the commencement of the present session, seek an interview with the distinguished individual who represents the interests of this nation at the court of St. James? Would he not desire to propound interrogatories to Mr. McLane? Would he not desire to learn from him, whether, indeed, all hope of honorable compromise was at an end? Having announced to Parliament, when the President's inaugural was the subject of discussion there, that "England had rights in Oregon which, by the blessing of God and the support of Parliament, she was prepared and determined to maintain," would he not seek to know from the American minister whether those rights could be peacefully maintained? Would he not seek to know all this before he determined the question whether England must appeal to the last resort of nations to maintain those rights? Most assuredly he would. No man of common sense can doubt this conclusion. And can it, for a moment, be supposed, that the President of the United States was so unmindful of the duties which rested upon him, as the Chief Magistrate of this great nation, as not considerately to foresee the ex-



citement which his message would create in England? That he did not forward instructions, or cause his Secretary of State to forward instructions, to our minister at London, as to how he should bear himself with reference to all the questions that would arise at that court in relation to our unadjusted difficulties with England? No sane man will, for a moment, indulge such a supposition. Now, I contend, Mr. Chairman, that, before this House shall adopt the conclusion of the President, that "all attempts at compromise have failed," hopelessly failed, and take action upon that conclusion, it is a duty, a high and solemn duty, resting upon it, to demand of the President an opportunity of seeing those instructions and all correspondence which have passed between the two Governments since the termination of negotiations in August last. The House has so determined, but no response has been received from the President. What is the character of those instructions? What the character of that correspondence? What the nature and character of the information forwarded to this Government by our minister at the court of St. James? I repeat, that, reasoning from the nature of things, no man can doubt the conclusions at which I have arrived. They are not mere conjectures—they are palpable, undoubted, self-evident facts. Have we not a right to see and know all before we adopt the measure which is urged upon us—a measure which may bring war, with all its long train of calamities, upon our country? The resolution which this House has passed contained the usual qualification, leaving the discretion of the President free to determine whether the information called for could be communicated consistently with the public interest. More than a week ago, the Senate passed a similar resolution. No response has yet been made by the President either to the House or the Senate. *Why is this so?* Have negotiations been resumed? If so, the reasons upon which the President grounds his recommendation of notice have ceased to exist; and this committee ought at once to be discharged from the further consideration of the resolution. Has the delicate point of honor, which was supposed to have resulted from the circumstances under which the negotiation closed in August last, been overcome? If so, certainly the committee ought to be discharged from the further consideration of the resolution of notice; for I presume no gentleman on this floor would deem it either wise or courteous to pass such a resolution in the midst of a negotiation, having for its object a peaceful, fair, and just settlement of the difficulty between the two Governments. I contend that we have a right to know the present state of the facts of the case. Have new propositions of compromise been submitted by the British Government? If so, what is their character? It is the duty of this House to insist upon knowing, before it takes action upon the resolution before it, which is the first of that series of measures recommended by the President for the maintenance of the right which he assumes for our Government to the *whole* of Oregon. Can this House, without knowing all the facts, wisely and properly determine whether the course which Congress is advised to take by the President and the Committee on Foreign Affairs, composed of a majority of his friends, is the best calculated to lead to a peaceful maintenance of the nation's rights; or whether its tendency will not rather be to involve us in an unnecessary war? I contend that this House cannot, consistently with its duty to the country, proceed to final action on this question, until all the facts shall be communicated. With these impressions, Mr. Chairman, I feel it to be my duty to call upon the Chairman of the Committee on Foreign Affairs to state distinctly to the House whether he is now prepared to repeat the declaration, which he made so positively at an early period of this debate, that no correspondence, other than that which has been already communicated, has taken place between the two Governments or the representatives of the two Governments? The relation in which he stands to the Administration will doubtless enable him to speak advisedly to the question.

Mr. C. J. INGERSOLL rose to explain.

And the floor having been yielded for the purpose—

Mr. INGERSOLL said, he did not recollect that he had said any thing on the subject before. He rather thought he had said nothing. He meant to say that on that point he rather thought he had said nothing. He would now say that recently he believed some



correspondence had taken place, between the British Minister and the Executive of the United States, which would be laid before the House without delay. As to the instructions, he was not aware that the President had been called upon to give any.

Mr. GENTRY proceeded. My opinions, then, are sustained in part by the revelation made by the Chairman of the Committee on Foreign Affairs; and, in my humble judgment, when time and circumstances shall have revealed to us all the facts of the case, the opinions which I have expressed will be fully sustained. The Chairman of the Committee on Foreign Affairs tells us that some correspondence has *recently* taken place between the British Minister and the Executive of the United States. I am happy to hear it. I congratulate the country upon that fact. Some progress has been made towards a resumption of negotiation, and the reason for giving notice of the termination of the convention of 1818 ceases; for it was upon the ground that negotiation was at an end that the President recommended that the notice should be given; and it was upon the ground that notice would induce a resumption of negotiation that gentlemen have urged, in this debate, the adoption of the resolution which proposes to give that notice. When all the truth shall be known, it will be seen, that my conjectures relative to the instructions given to Mr. McLane will also be sustained. Until those instructions shall be brought fully to the light I will not express an opinion as to the conduct of the Executive in relation to our Oregon difficulties; until then I abstain from expressing any opinion upon some subjects to which our attention has been somewhat *provoked* by the declarations of the friends of the present Executive Administration during this debate; until then I reserve the expression of my opinion with reference to the declaration made by the gentleman from New York, (Mr. P. KING,) when he said that he "could not but think that the Administration had been greatly in error when it made to England the offer of the 49th parallel of latitude. It might become embarrassed by having assumed such a position. With the responsibility, however, which pertained to him as an American citizen, Mr. K. should freely express his opinions. It had been said that the Administration must have felt sure the offer would be rejected, or it never would have been made. The offer was rejected, and the position of the Administration rendered stronger thereby; and thus it had been saved from experiencing any injury from the error it had committed, if error it was." And further: "Any man of common sense might have known that such a proposition to the British Government would be rejected, as it has been, without even being remitted across the water." Until then I reserve my opinion in regard to the declaration of the gentleman from S. Carolina, (Mr. RHETT,) when he, in reply to the gentleman from New York, (Mr. P. KING,) said that "as the gentleman had been so kind as to inform the House what was said elsewhere of Mr. Calhoun and the South, he would take the liberty of telling the gentleman, in return, what was said of him and those who voted with him in this matter. It was said that this was a quarrel got up for purposes of political power and of President-gambling, and not for Oregon at all; that it was a profligate gambling with the limbs, and lives, and blood, and happiness, of the people of the United States, for an object like this, for the gratification of a reckless ambition."

Perhaps it would be prudent, also, to abstain from expressing an opinion upon the imputation made by the same gentleman from New York against a distinguished Senator from South Carolina, (Mr. CALHOUN,) who is now, most honorably to himself, exerting his high talents and large influence, in the other wing of this Capitol, to preserve the peace of the country; but I would feel that I was conniving at the grossest injustice if I were to fail to express my most unqualified disbelief of the truth of that imputation. I adjourn the discussion of these and other similar allusions, which have been made by the friends of the present Administration in this debate, to the effect that this war about Oregon is only intended to be a war for political purposes, for party effect; a war to strike down one aspirant to the Presidency and build up another. *Future developments* will shed light upon these topics which we are not *now* permitted to see. I do not feel authorized to speak all that I think at present; for if, despite the exertions of the patriotic, the country shall be involved in all the calamities of war, it will be the duty of every patriotic citizen, whether in private or public station, to sustain the constituted



authorities of the country, so far as may be necessary to enable them to wield all the resources and energies of the nation to bring the war to a successful and glorious termination; and, therefore, in the present state of uncertainty with reference to the future, I am unwilling to indulge in a harsh or uncharitable judgment of their conduct. When the day shall come for the American people to hold them to account for the manner in which they have discharged the high duties entrusted to them, then I propose to have something to say upon these themes, now forbidden by considerations which I need not state. But I must say that, if it shall appear that any public functionary of this Government, charged by his countrymen with the management of the question which now threatens the peace of the nation, has been so lost to patriotism and honor as to lend himself to the guidance of motives and objects, such as are imputed by the remarks to which I have referred—so base and wicked as to put up the peace of the country, with all the interests which stand connected with its preservation, as a gambling stake in a desperate and vile play of mean ambition, he deserves the concentrated execrations of the present and all future generations of mankind; and there ought to be “a whip of scorpions placed in every honest hand, to lash the rascal naked through the world.”

But, sir, I waive the discussion of all questions of this kind as unsuited to this occasion, and proceed to address myself to the important subject now under consideration by this committee. The House of Representatives has resolved itself into a Committee of the Whole on the state of the Union; and the question for our consideration is, what action ought to be taken by the Congress of the United States upon the resolution reported by the Committee on Foreign Affairs, which is as follows:

“*Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That the President of the United States forthwith cause notice to be given to the Government of Great Britain that the convention between the United States and Great Britain, concerning the territory of Oregon, of the sixth of August, eighteen hundred and twenty-seven, signed at London, shall be annulled and abrogated twelve months after the expiration of the said notice, conformably to the second article of the said convention of the sixth of August, eighteen hundred and twenty-seven.*”

In considering this question, we must embrace in one comprehensive view all the interests of this great Republic, as those interests are liable to be affected, injuriously or advantageously, by a disgraceful surrender or firm maintenance of national rights and national honor, by the preservation of peace, with all its countless blessings, or by the occurrence of war, with all its innumerable calamities and evils. In considering this question, we ought to elevate ourselves above every motive which does not have its origin in the purest patriotism, in a sincere desire to arrive at wise conclusions, and to take such action as will best protect the honor and the rights of our country, and promote the happiness and welfare of the twenty millions of people committed to our guardianship. With my mind thus chastened, I have endeavored to consider this question. I have formed my opinion; I have determined upon the line of conduct which I believe to be my duty to pursue. My opinion is, that we will best discharge our duty to our country by declining to take any action upon the question now before this committee until the last month of the present session of Congress, or until the next session of Congress; and that, if we are forced to vote upon it now, we ought to vote against it. What evil can possibly result from this course? How can the rights of the nation be jeopardized by a postponement of the vote upon this resolution? By such a postponement, we will give further time for the adjustment of the difficulty between the two Governments by negotiation; and we will then come to the consideration of the question better prepared than we now are to determine wisely what ought to be done by Congress to maintain our claims in Oregon. We will then be able to know *certainly* whether there is in the language of the President, “*satisfactory evidence that no compromise which the United States ought to accept can be effected.*” In urging this course of policy, I am not unmindful of the fact that the resolution now before this committee is *the measure* recommended by the Administration; nor of the fact that a large majority of this House are the political friends and supporters of the present Administration. But are they not more devoted to country than to party? If that majority shall perceive that



the President has rashly committed himself to a policy not necessary to maintain the rights of the nation, and calculated to endanger the peace of the country, will they, under the blind guidance of party, follow his lead? The wise framers of our Constitution intended to form a system of government in which the Legislature should be independent of the Executive; and they invested the Legislature with power to check and control the Executive, when the public interest demanded the exercise of that power.

I trust that this Congress will sublimely realize the intentions of those illustrious founders of our Government, by interposing its authority to arrest the Executive in that reckless system of measures in relation to our difficulties with England, which, if carried out, must inevitably involve this nation in a most unnecessary and calamitous war. The resolution now before this committee, proposing to give peremptory and unqualified notice to England of the termination, at the end of a year, of the treaty of 1818, may fairly be regarded as the measure of the Administration. I hope that none will attribute my opposition to it to party motives. I opposed the election of the present President of the United States, but I did not come here to make factious opposition to his Administration. Upon all questions relating to our foreign affairs, especially, I would be far more agreeable to me to support than to oppose the Executive. I hold the opinion that all questions relating to our foreign affairs ought, as far as possible, to be placed beyond the scope of party views and party considerations. And I am not without a hope that a majority of Congress, acting upon patriotic motives, will defeat the Administration upon this measure. I feel that I am justified in regarding the resolution now before the committee *as the measure of the Administration*, from the fact that it was reported to this House by a committee composed mainly of the friends of the Administration; from the fact that a resolution precisely analogous has been reported in the other wing of this Capitol by a committee similarly constituted; and from facts and circumstances, known to us all, constantly transpiring in this hall and out of it. Any material change or modification of the resolution is, then, a defeat of the Executive. I have already stated that I believe it to be the wisest policy for Congress to take no affirmative action whatever, at the present time, upon the question of notice. I fear that a majority of this House will not agree with me. Whilst it is probable that a majority of this House is in favor of giving notice in some form, I cannot believe that a majority will sustain the resolution *in its present form*. I admit that the resolution may be so modified as to relieve it of its hostile aspect, and make it powerless for good or evil. But, in my humble judgment, Congress ought not to interpose in matters connected with the foreign affairs of the nation, unless its interposition shall carry with it that dignity which can alone attach to that kind of action which founded in wisdom, is powerfully effective of good. Nevertheless, if the resolution cannot be defeated entirely, let it be modified so as to relieve it of its hostile aspect. In either event, the Executive will not be sustained in his reckless system of measures and the peace of the nation will be preserved.

I repeat that, if I believed this measure of the Administration calculated to conserve the peace of the country, and necessary to maintain its rights, it would give me sincere pleasure to support it. But I believe its tendency will be to produce war, and that it is not necessary to maintain the rights of the nation. I have nothing to say in relation to the various propositions which have been made to amend it. I desire all that I say to be understood as applying to the resolution as reported by the Committee on Foreign Affairs. On what grounds do its supporters urge its adoption? It is said to be necessary to bring the difficulty between this Government and England, in relation to their conflicting territorial claims on the northwestern coast of this continent, to a speedy and peaceful settlement. It is said to be necessary to induce a resumption of negotiations, and as an auxiliary to our negotiators. How is it to produce these effects? Where are the proofs of these assertions? Has not England already given us sufficient proofs that she desires a peaceful and speedy adjustment of that difficulty? Was not Lord Ashburton charged with its adjustment by England when he was sent by the Government to settle the difficulty in relation to the northeastern boundary? And was



not the adjustment of this difficulty postponed then, because it complicated the difficulty of agreeing upon a treaty with regard to the northeastern boundary, which was then a question of urgent necessity, imminently threatening to disturb the peace of the two nations? Reference to the documents will sustain me in these facts, and in the declaration which I now make, that, immediately after the ratification of the treaty of Washington by England, that Government forwarded instructions to its resident minister here to move the President to forward such instructions to the American minister in London as would authorize him to negotiate a treaty prescribing a boundary between England and the United States on the northwest coast of this continent.

Then Mr. Pakenham was sent here with full power to negotiate a treaty to settle definitively the claims of the two Governments in the Oregon territory. It appears, from the correspondence communicated with the President's annual message, that Mr. Pakenham importuned the authorities of this Government repeatedly, before he could induce them to enter seriously upon the important business which he was commissioned by his Government to adjust. After considerable delay, negotiations commenced, and were in progress on the 4th of March last, between Mr. Calhoun, as the representative of this Government, and the British minister. On that day Mr. Polk was inaugurated President of the United States, and, as is usual on that occasion, delivered an address, in which he reiterated a resolution passed by the political convention which nominated him as a candidate for the presidency, that the title of the United States to the Oregon country is clear and unquestionable, and announced that all the measures necessary to perfect that title, and make it complete by occupancy, would be put in operation, &c. What was the effect of this declaration?

All knew how this declaration exasperated the British ministry and people. No one can have forgotten the replies made to it on the floor of Parliament by Sir Robert Peel, the Minister of the Crown, and Lord John Russell, the head of the Opposition, and how their declarations were instantly responded to by all parties on all sides of the House. Parliament seemed unanimous in the declaration that Britain had rights in Oregon, which she was prepared and determined to maintain at all hazards.

Mr. Calhoun retired from the Department of State, and Mr. Buchanan was appointed his successor; and, under his auspices, the negotiation with Mr. Pakenham was continued; and by him, under the direction of the President, a proposition was made to the British minister to make the parallel of the 49th degree of north latitude the boundary line between England and the United States. This proposition was substantially the same as those made by two preceding administrations of our Government, with this difference, that, in some slight and unimportant particulars, it seemed to be less favorable to England than the propositions which had been previously made by Mr. Monroe's administration and by Mr. Adams's. It was rejected by Mr. Pakenham, and immediately *huffishly* withdrawn by Mr. Buchanan, under the direction of the President. The withdrawal was accompanied by a labored argument, to prove that the title of the United States to the whole of the Oregon territory was "clear and unquestionable." This occurrence transpired in August last. On the first Monday in December last, the President communicated to Congress his annual message, in which he gave us a history of these transactions, apologized for having made a proposition to partition the territory, and, after informing us of the rejection by the British minister of his proposition, proceeded to say:

"The extraordinary and wholly inadmissible demands of the British Government, and the rejection of the proposition made in deference alone to what had been done by my predecessors, and the implied obligation which their acts seemed to impose, afford satisfactory evidence that no compromise which the United States ought to accept can be effected. With this conviction the proposition of compromise, which has been made and rejected, was, by my direction, subsequently withdrawn, and our title to the whole Oregon territory asserted, and, as is believed, maintained by irrefragable facts and arguments."

And further, he informs us:

"All attempts at compromise having failed, it becomes the duty of Congress to consider what measures it may be proper to adopt for the security and protection of our citizens now inhabiting, or who may hereafter inhabit, Oregon, and for the maintenance of our just title to that territory."



And, that no man may doubt the effect of the measure of notice which he recommends, he proceeds to say:

“At the end of the year’s notice, should Congress think it proper to make provision for giving that notice, we shall have reached a period when the national rights in Oregon must either be abandoned or firmly maintained. That they cannot be abandoned without a sacrifice of both national honor and interest is too clear to admit of doubt.”

Mr. Chairman, these are the circumstances under which we are called upon to give this notice, to pass this Administration measure. We will fail to determine correctly the effect of this notice if we do not embrace within our view of the subject all of the circumstances with which it stands connected. By itself, and of itself, notice is nothing; for the convention of 1818 expressly provides that either, of the nations which are parties to that treaty may at any time terminate it, by giving one year’s notice to the other party. But if Congress shall adopt the *extreme position* of the President, by passing the resolution now before this committee, under existing circumstances, this Government will stand pledged to that series of measures hinted at by the President, when he says, that “at the end of the year’s notice, should Congress think it proper to make provision for giving that notice, we shall have reached a period when the national rights in Oregon must either be abandoned or firmly maintained. That they cannot be abandoned without a sacrifice of both national honor and interest is too clear to admit of doubt.” Looking at the question in this connexion, who can regard it as a peace measure? Who can believe that its tendency will be to facilitate a resumption of negotiations? Who can fail to see that its tendency will be to increase the difficulties which obstruct a peaceful adjustment of our difficulty with England? And who can say that it will not tend to produce war? What necessity is there for the adoption of this resolution? What will be its effect? How is it to operate towards making England negotiate a peaceful adjustment of the controversy? What does it amount to? To this, and this only: We have a right to the *whole of Oregon*; but in 1818 we agreed that you should occupy it jointly with us until one or the other of us should terminate the convention. We now find it our interest to terminate the convention, and you must march out; the *whole* country is ours, and we will have it, peaceably or forcibly; and, if you do not march out at our bidding, we intend to drive you out at the end of a year. Is this a suasive argument to induce liberal concessions and fair compromises by negotiation? What is there in the history of England to induce the belief that she can be thus bullied into a compliance with the demands of our Government? In what page of her long and eventful history can any thing be found to justify such conclusions? Will she negotiate with the sword of coercion brandished in her face? Is the Executive branch of this Government acting under the belief that the reasons and motives which make England desire a continuation of peace with this nation are so powerful, that she will yield to our demands, under circumstances of disgrace and dishonor to herself? Are they striving to obtain a settlement of our difficulty with England under such circumstances, as that they can claim to have bullied that nation into terms? Is this the triumph which they propose to achieve? Are these the poor, mean, base, damnable motives and objects which, actuating the functionaries of this Government, have brought the peace of the country into unnecessary peril? Are these the high and patriotic aims of those who are entrusted with the destiny of this great nation? Is it thus that they acquit themselves of the high task confided to them by the American people? I trust not. I trust that the President and all his associates in the Executive administration are laboring with singleness of purpose to effect a peaceful adjustment of our difficulties—such an adjustment as will secure the rights and honor of the nation without jeopardizing its peace. My opinion upon this point will be determined by the developments of the future. I express none now. I contend, however, that if this Government is aiming to effect such an adjustment of our controversy with England, the adoption of the resolution now before this committee will not facilitate the accomplishment of that object. It is not necessary, as has been argued, to stimulate negotia-



ion. We have abundant proofs that England anxiously desires to settle the controversy by negotiation. Her sagacious statesmen know that, if any thing can give us the whole of the Oregon territory, it will be time, and the operation of that "American multiplication table," so delicately referred to in this debate. England understands her interest too well not to desire a peaceful and early settlement of the difficulty. That she does not desire to go to war with us is abundantly proven by her own conduct, and by the arguments of gentlemen in this debate, who have labored to magnify the reasons and causes which make it almost fatal to her to do so. And I apprehend that he who seeks to find a cause for the extraordinary display of that spirit of bullying and of gasconading defiance which has characterized this debate, equalling any thing that Mexico ever achieved in that field of glory, cannot do better than to refer it to the profound conviction which gentlemen entertain that England, by reason of causes having their existence in her domestic affairs, cannot be provoked at the present time to go to war with the United States.

But is it certain that a peaceful settlement of the difficulty is desired by all who have spoken on this subject? Gentlemen scout the idea of a partition of the territory. Having satisfied themselves that our title to the *whole territory* is clear and unquestionable, they assume that any settlement of the question which surrenders a portion of the territory to England amounts to a disgraceful purchase of peace by giving away American soil. Unless they are prepared to give England some valuable equivalent for her claims in that territory, it is preposterous to expect such a settlement of the controversy as they propose, by any other mode than that of conquest by war. I do not believe that this nation ought to go to war to maintain such a claim to the whole of Oregon. I conscientiously believe that gentlemen who contend for the position to which I have referred, ground their opinions upon the resolution of the Baltimore Convention and the inaugural of the President, rather than upon the *facts* and *arguments* of the case. I do not believe that this nation has a clear and unquestionable title to *the whole* of Oregon. If I did so believe, I would be willing to wage war to make good that title. I would not stop to inquire how long, how disastrous, or terrible the struggle might be, I would go for such a war rather than purchase dishonorable peace by yielding up territory which was "clearly and unquestionably ours." But we have no such clear title. The administration of Mr. Monroe, of Mr. Adams, and of Mr. Polk, have proposed to partition the territory by making the 49th degree of north latitude the boundary between the two nations west of the Rocky mountains.

We have thus, by solemn acts of our own Government, admitted that England has rights in that territory as well as ourselves. We are committed to the principle of compromise by a partition of the territory. Shall we be justified in this enlightened age, and before the nations of the earth, and more especially by our own countrymen and our own consciences, in going to war for a territory in regard to which we have placed ourselves in this attitude?

Mr. Chairman, I am endeavoring to convince this committee that there is no necessity for this notice, as a means of facilitating a peaceful adjustment of our difficulties with England in relation to the controversy about the territory of Oregon. With a view to this aim, let me inquire whether there is anything in the recent advices from England to induce the belief that the Government of England is not disposed to adjust this controversy peacefully and liberally? I maintain that there is nothing in those advices to justify such a conclusion. The newspapers of England reveal to us the fact that the conduct of the Executive administration of our Government in relation to Oregon has excited feelings of animosity and resentment in that kingdom, which, under ordinary circumstances, would have displayed itself in a most imposing form. But they reveal to us also the additional fact that the people of England found their resentment about Oregon more than neutralized by that portion of the message which advises Congress to abandon that system of policy which has built up manufacturing establishments in this country, which have, to a considerable extent, driven English manufactures out of the American market, and which have entered into successful competition



with the manufactures of England in other regions of the globe. The tariff part of the message is more than a salvo to the Oregon part. Whilst the Oregon part of the message makes John Bull frown, the free trade part of it drives that frown from his brow; and he delightedly exults in contemplating the commercial and manufacturing prosperity which will enure to him, when, by the policy of the President, the manufacturing interests of this country shall be broken down, and the country thereby *restored* to a commercial dependance on England, like that which existed when these free States were her colonies. The British Government, then, will make no war with the United States about Oregon, whilst our Government offers her, *as an equivalent for her claims in that territory*, commercial advantages far more valuable to her than the undisputed possession of the whole of Oregon. Give England satisfactory assurance that the policy recommended by the President will be the permanent policy of this nation, and she will, to secure such a result, give us the whole of Oregon; and I am no sure that she would not cede us the Canadas also. For what purpose does she maintain her colonial system, at a vast expense, other than to promote her commercial and manufacturing interests. Guaranty to her these interests, and she would gladly relieve herself of the expense of governing and defending those colonies. Has our minister at London been instructed to urge these considerations upon the British Government, to dispose that Government to liberal concessions with respect to the Oregon controversy? Has he been instructed to negotiate a commercial treaty with that Government? I would like to know. I desire to see those instructions. There will be no war, sir, about Oregon, unless, by some act of extreme folly, this Government shall place the question in such an attitude that England cannot make the concessions demanded by our Government, without sacrificing her honor, without losing her high position among the nations.

Gentlemen affect extreme sensitiveness about the honor of the country, as involved in this controversy with England. They assume that "*our title to the whole of Oregon is clear and unquestionable*," and declare that any adjustment of our controversy with England, which shall give to her any portion of that territory, will be a dishonorable purchase of peace. Can they see no dishonor in adapting the legislation of their country, on questions affecting the interests of our own people and country, to the views and interests of England? Are they willing to purchase peace, in a controversy for comparatively valueless territory, by sacrificing, as a peace offering, that wise system of policy which was founded by the fathers of this republic—by *surrendering* that policy which has made our country grow, and prosper, and flourish, as no nation ever before grew, and prospered, and flourished?

But, Mr. Chairman, the clock admonishes me that the hour to which I am limited by a rule of the House is rapidly passing away, and that I must hasten to some other considerations which I desire briefly to present to this committee. Is the title of the United States to the whole of the Oregon territory, or any part of it, a perfect title—a "*clear and unquestionable*" title? I am not a lawyer, and am not competent, therefore, to go into those nice distinctions and technicalities, those refinements of logic and argument which have been very properly introduced in this debate by gentlemen learned in the law, to determine the doubtful questions of fact and of law involved in that title. The only law with which I am familiar (and I am not sure that I am even master of that) is the law of common sense. I have looked into the facts of the case, I have listened to the arguments, and, as far as I have been able, have made myself acquainted with the principles of public law applicable to the controversy; and it appears to me, that at every point of the controversy there is a plausible conflict between the claims of England and the United States; and if all the facts which either nation contends for, as the ground of their respective claims, be admitted as true, yet, when you apply the admitted principles of public law to the claim of either nation, no principle of that law can be found which will determine either nation to have a *perfect* title to the whole or any part of Oregon; and it is my deliberate opinion, formed after the most careful examination of the subject, that, if the Emperor of China had the power now to make a settlement in



any part of the territory of Oregon not occupied by British subjects or American citizens, and could maintain it for a sufficient length of time, he could establish a better right than any now possessed by England or the United States; for, as I have said, neither the one Government nor the other has performed all the acts, complied with all the conditions, which by the law of nations, is required to give either nation a perfect title to the whole of that territory, or any part of it. I know that this opinion is in conflict with very high authority. I know it is assumed that the Secretary of State (Mr. Buchanan) has, in his late correspondence with the British Minister, (Mr. Packenham,) demonstrated conclusively that our title to the whole territory of Oregon, to the latitude of 54 deg. 40 min. is "clear and unquestionable." Mr. Buchanan is an able lawyer, and he has argued the claim of the United States to that territory as a feed attorney argues a cause for his client. I have examined it as a juror. Bring the Secretary to the Bible, and require him to swear to his conclusions, and he would start aghast, horror-stricken at the idea. The crime of perjury would present itself in horrid deformity before him. No, sir; no man knows better than the Secretary of State that the United States have not a perfect title to that territory; and I have no doubt that he has been surprised and amused to find that his argument has been so successful in convincing intelligent gentlemen on this floor of the truth of conclusions which he himself did not believe, nor expect any other man of sense to believe.

Upon what grounds do we claim a perfect title to the whole of that territory? By a treaty concluded with Spain in 1819, we acquired all the rights of that kingdom to the territory on the northwest coast of this continent north of the 42d degree of north latitude. Had Spain a perfect title to that territory, when she ceded her rights in that region to this Government? Her navigators were undoubtedly the first to discover and partially explore the northwest coast of this continent; but centuries passed away, and Spain made no such settlements in the country as, by the law of nations, would have perfected her title by discovery. In 1788, Lieutenant Meares, a British officer, in command of a merchant vessel, landed at Nootka, and constructed a hut. In the ensuing year his establishment was destroyed by Spain, who sent armed vessels to Nootka for that purpose. England resented this practical assertion of exclusive rights of sovereignty by Spain, contending that no nation possessed the exclusive rights claimed by Spain; that she, in common with other nations, had a right to navigate the northern Pacific ocean, land upon its coasts, trade with the natives, *and make settlements*. Spain insisted upon her pretension, and the two nations were preparing for war, when the difficulty was adjusted by a treaty, called the Nootka convention. I have carefully examined that treaty, and, according to my understanding of its provisions, Spain conceded all for which England contended. She practically renounced her pretensions to the right of exclusive dominion, and admitted the country on the northwest coast of the Pacific to be free and open to all the nations of the earth, for the purposes of trade, settlement, occupation, and colonization. If I am right in this conclusion, the Nootka convention is not such a treaty as is abrogated by the occurrence of war between the nations which are parties to it; and I conclude that, in acquiring the rights of Spain to the territory now in dispute between Great Britain and the United States, our Government did not acquire a perfect title. The claim of Spain originally extended to the sixty-first degree of North latitude.

The Government of the United States concluded a convention with Russia, in 1824, by which it was agreed, "that hereafter there shall not be formed by the citizens of the United States, or under the authority of the said States, any establishment upon the northwest coast of America, nor in any of the islands adjacent, *to the north* of 54 degrees and 40 minutes of north latitude, and that in the same manner there shall be none formed by Russian subjects, or under the authority of Russia, south of the same parallel." Now, if the United States derived a perfect title from Spain, why did we cede, without an equivalent, to Russia, the territory situate between the latitude of 54 deg. 40 min. and the 61st degree of north latitude? And if the United States believed that



Spain possessed a perfect title to the whole territory, why did our Government, in 1818, before we had acquired the rights of Spain by the Florida treaty, make a formal proposition to England to divide with her the Oregon territory, by making the 49th degree of north latitude a boundary, without even making allusion to the rights of Spain? And if the title of Spain was a perfect title, how can our Government found a claim to the territory drained by the Columbia river, upon the discovery of the mouth of that river by Capt. Gray? Upon that discovery, made in 1792, and the establishment of Astoria, near the mouth of Columbia river, on its south bank, in 1811, and the discovery of the southern head-waters of the Columbia river, and its exploration to its mouth, in 1805, by Lewis and Clarke, despatched for that purpose by their Government, the United States claim exclusive sovereignty over all the territory drained by that river and its tributaries. Whilst I admit that these are better grounds of title than any other nation possesses, I do not believe they constitute a perfect title. The whole northwest coast of the Pacific had been discovered and carefully explored centuries before the discovery of the mouth of the Columbia by Capt. Gray, by the navigators of Spain and England, but their discoveries were not followed up by such settlements as would give either of those nations rights of sovereignty over the country. The mouth of the Columbia was discovered by Heceta, a Spanish navigator, in 1775, seventeen years before the discovery of Capt. Gray. Can the discovery of a river previously discovered, give territorial rights to the nation making the second discovery? Such a position, I apprehend, cannot be maintained; and, therefore, neither the discovery of the mouth of the Columbia, (long before discovered by Heceta,) nor the explorations of the coast by British navigators, (long before explored by the Spaniards,) can give to either England or the United States territorial rights in Oregon. The trading establishment at the mouth of the Columbia remained in the possession of Mr. Astor until the war of 1812, when it was taken by a British force, and the British standard was erected. By the treaty of Ghent, Astoria was restored to the United States, and our flag was officially hoisted over it in 1818. It is therefore, technically, now in the possession of the United States, though it has not in fact been occupied under the authority of the Government, nor by the citizens of the United States, since its restoration; yet this is the only settlement in Oregon upon which we can found a claim of title; for, by the treaty between England and the United States of 1818, now in force, neither nation can found a claim upon any settlements made since that treaty. The claims of both nations, therefore, are resting now precisely upon the same grounds that they did in 1818. Is this such a settlement and occupation as, by the law of nations, will give a perfect title? If it be not, the discoveries and exploration of Lewis and Clarke lose their value, because they have not been followed up by a sufficient settlement and occupation of the territory. The value of Lewis and Clarke's discoveries and explorations is somewhat neutralized by the discovery, in 1811, of the northern head-waters of the Columbia, and its exploration to its junction with the southern branch of that river, by Thompson, an agent of the Northwest Company. England asserts that, in 1806 and 1811, the same company established trading posts on the northern branches of the Columbia, and on the main stream of that river; and that, in 1806, Dr. Frazer, under the order of the Northwest Company, crossed the Rocky mountains, discovered the head-waters of Frazer's river, and established a trading post on that river, which, as is alleged by England, had been previously discovered and partially explored in 1792 by Mackenzie. If all this be true, it is very questionable whether these temporary establishments of roving hunters and trappers, for purposes merely of hunting and trading with the natives, constitute that kind of settlement and occupation which public law determines to be necessary to create a title to territory; and none of the discoveries inland, alluded to, except those of Lewis and Clarke, seem to meet the requisitions of the law of nations. They were made by individuals pursuing their private interests, and not commissioned by their Governments to go upon expeditions of discovery.

But, sir, I will not further pursue this very dry subject, with which this committee has been already so much wearied. I desired to say only so much upon this branch of



he question as would indicate the grounds of the opinion which I have expressed, that neither England nor the United States have a complete and perfect title to the whole or any part of the Oregon territory. The Governments of Great Britain and the United States have, however, for a long term of years, set up a vague, indefinite, indeterminate claim, to the whole of the territory, and no other nation pretends to contest with them for title. Each of the nations have at different times proposed to adjust their conflicting claims by a partition of the territory. They have failed to agree, only because they differed as to what constituted a fair and just division of the territory. The time has now arrived when, if the two nations desire to maintain peace, they *must* proceed speedily to adjust this controversy. It cannot be much longer postponed with safety. The difficulty is in finding some principle upon which to proceed, which, while it will do justice to both nations in the matter of territory, will also take care of the honor of both nations. What is that principle? The 49th parallel of north latitude is declared, by a convention between the United States and Great Britain, signed at London, October 20, 1818, to be "the line of demarcation between the territories of the United States and those of his Britannic Majesty, and that the said line shall form the northern boundary of the said territories of the United States and the southern boundary of the territories of his Britannic Majesty, from the Lake of the Woods to the Stony Mountains."

Mr. Chairman, I am a plain farmer; and, having been reared to that avocation, I am, like most farmers, very partial to straight fences. By the right of contiguity the United States may justly claim to extend their northern boundary due west from the point of termination east of the Rocky Mountains to the Pacific Ocean, and to settle and occupy, and exercise all the rights of sovereignty over, all of the Oregon territory lying south of the 49th parallel of north latitude; and, in my humble judgment, the same principle gives England an equitable claim to all of that territory north of that parallel latitude; and a settlement of the controversy between the two nations upon this principle is demanded by the interests of the two nations, and by principles of right and justice. Propositions to settle the controversy upon this principle have been repeatedly made by this Government, and as often rejected by England. But now, when our Government sees that the controversy must soon be closed, peacefully or otherwise, I cannot but believe that her regard for the peace of the world, and her own interests, involved in the maintenance of peace with this nation, if not her sense of right and justice, will induce England to accede to such a compromise. I believe that, if the executive branch of our Government will, with a prudent, wise, and statesmanlike judgment, exert itself for that purpose, a treaty may speedily be concluded with England, thus adjusting our controversy with that Power in relation to the Oregon territory. In the mean time, Congress ought to be careful to take no action on the subject calculated to increase the difficulties which surround it. Is not the measure now under consideration calculated, if adopted, to increase those difficulties, and make a peaceful settlement less easy of attainment? I have already endeavored to answer the arguments of those gentlemen who have labored in this debate to show, that to give notice to England, in the form proposed by the Committee on Foreign Affairs, (which, in relation to the question, may, without any violation of courtesy, be regarded as the organ of the executive Administration,) is not necessary as a means of facilitating a peaceful settlement of the difficulty by negotiation, nor as an auxiliary aid to our negotiators. It remains for me to show that its tendency is precisely the reverse of this; that it will increase the difficulties of a peaceful settlement by negotiation, and tend to involve the two nations in war, and I will have accomplished the task which I have felt it to be my duty to undertake.

Now, to determine the effect of the measure which we are called upon to adopt, we must not leave out of view the fact that the President has committed this Government to the position that the whole of Oregon is ours, and advises the Legislative branch of the Government to take the same position, by passing this notice as the first of a series of measures necessary to maintain this position. If Congress shall act in conformity with the advice of the President, by passing the notice in the form reported by the Com-



mittee on Foreign Affairs, this Government will stand pledged to the whole series of measures that will be necessary to maintain the position thus assumed. What will be the consequences resulting from this? What will be the position of this nation at the end of the year? I maintain it to be a palpable, an incontrovertible truth, that the nation will stand in a position from which it cannot recede without dishonor, nor advance without war. National pride, national honor, will urge us forward at all hazards, and I, if I shall then have a voice in the councils of the nation, will say, Go forward at all hazards, and maintain the honor of the nation. There must be no cowardly retreat. "We have passed the Rubicon." We must march up to 54° 40' north latitude. We must conquer from England the whole of Oregon. But the gentlemen who urge the adoption of this resolution tell us that all this is to be accomplished peacefully. How can it be peacefully effected? How will you substitute the laws of the United States for the British laws which are now in force in that territory, without hostile collisions? What will you do with the British magistrates now in commission in that territory? How will you displace them? Will there not be a conflict of jurisdictions that must inevitably eventuate in war? What will you do with the numerous forts and trading establishments in that territory over which the British flag now waves? Will it be consistent with the honor of this nation, after taking the position to which I have referred, to permit the British flag to wave in that territory? Such a thing cannot be permitted without bringing disgrace and infamy upon the nation. How will you peacefully displace the Cross of St. George, and substitute in its stead the star-spangled banner? Will it comport with the honor of England to peaceably permit this to be done—to see you drive her subjects out of the territory, or compel them to take the oath of allegiance to the United States? All this must be done, if Congress takes the first step recommended by the President. That step being taken, nothing short of the whole of Oregon, and the exercise by this Government of all the rights of sovereignty over the whole of Oregon, will maintain the national honor. Is it wise for this Government after having three times offered to divide the territory with England, thus to place itself under the necessity of going to war to maintain an unfounded claim to the whole of it? But what if war comes? What patriot will be appalled by the horrors of war? Is not a willingness to plunge the nation into war the newest and truest test of patriotism? Who will lose the distinction of being considered a patriot, when that distinction can be obtained at the cheap price of a speech and a vote? At the risk of having my patriotism and courage called in question, I must say, that I deem that fear neither unmanly nor ignoble which fears to bring upon this nation the calamities which a war with England must bring.

If such a war should come, what will be its character and what its consequences? I will not underrate the prowess of my countrymen, nor the martial resources of my country. In a defensive war, against unjust aggression, I believe this nation capable of defending itself against England, or any other nation. Though we might be vanquished upon many fields, we could never be conquered. As long as there was left one descendant of the Whigs of the Revolution to shout defiance against the minions of tyranny and offer up his life in defence of that inheritance of freedom bequeathed by his ancestors, resistance could never end. But, when we are talking about the probabilities of war, it is unwise to underrate our adversary. Gentlemen sneer at those who suggest as an argument in favor of peace, the calamitous consequences of a war with England, and intimate that such is not the proper way "to prepare the heart of the nation for war." The heart of the nation is, in my opinion, always prepared for a war that is necessary to protect the honor or defend the rights of the nation. But when we are debating measures, the effect of which may be to bring us into a war which is neither necessary for the maintenance of our rights nor honor, I do not conceive it to be unwise or unpatriotic to prepare the head of the nation as well as its heart, by pointing the public mind to such considerations as will make it inquire into the necessity of the war, and the sacrifices which it will impose, and into all the consequences which it will produce. We all remember, with a just pride, that our ancestors, when this



on was much feebler than it is now, waged a successful war with England, which extorted from that nation the acknowledgment of our independence; but surely we have not forgotten, nor ought we to forget, that, in that war, we had for our ally France, the most powerful and warlike of all the nations of Europe.

We have had another war with England, which did not result in our subjugation; but surely we have not forgotten, nor ought we to forget, that, at that time, the energies of England were employed in a war with Napoleon, who wielded the power and resources of a large portion of Europe. If we fight England now, we will fight her at a time when she can direct against us the whole of her military and naval power. She is at peace with all the nations of the earth; she is in cordial friendship with all the powerful nations of Europe, and in close alliance with our ancient ally France; and, although we are more powerful as a nation than we were at those periods when we were in collision with her, the least informed amongst us knows that England has more than kept pace with us in all that constitutes preparation for war. If we go to war, we will go to war upon an issue which cannot be determined until one or the other nation is entirely overcome, conquered, annihilated. Every man of sense knows that one of the first events of the war would be the occupation of Oregon by British troops. That territory is too remote for us to make that the theatre of the war. We could not march our army thither, for it is two thousand miles west of our most western settlements, and separated from them by dreary deserts, and mountains almost inaccessible. We could not transport an army thither by sea; for, to say nothing of the vast and tedious distance of a voyage by sea, our transports would be cut off by the superior naval force of England.

The gentleman from South Carolina, (Mr. HOLMES,) has drawn an eloquent, but not unwrought, picture of the character and consequences of a war with England. I will not attempt to repeat what he has said so well. Suffice it to say, that by her superior naval force she would sweep our commerce from the ocean. She would hover, with her vast navies, along our unfortified seacoast of more than three thousand miles, threatening every commercial city on that seaboard. Our Government owes protection to all its citizens, and would be compelled to bring into action, not a large army, but many large armies; for every city threatened with attack would have a right to claim protection and defence. Some of them would probably be successfully defended; others would be given to the flames, or laid under contribution. Thus the war would be waged, and thus continued, until one or the other of the combatants would be entirely conquered, or until both of them, from very exhaustion, wearied of the conflict. The latter is more probable even; for, while I am entirely certain that England cannot conquer and subjugate the United States, I am equally certain that the United States cannot conquer and subjugate England. After a long and wasting war, the two nations would make a treaty of peace, the main features of which would be, a partition of the territory in dispute, precisely what ought to be done now without a war. As an offset to the territory which we would achieve, we would have a national debt of little less than ten hundred millions of dollars to weigh down the energies of the nation, and oppress our posterity for many generations; with other evils almost innumerable, which will at once strike the minds of reflecting men. Instead of advancing our country forward to the consummation of that high destiny of power and glory, so often referred to with patriotic enthusiasm in this debate, we would inevitably retrograde from our present position. The energies of our people would be diverted by the inexorable necessities of war from ameliorating and humanizing pursuits. A very large portion of our population would be required to engage in the military service of the country, and the residue, not thus employed, would find their industry rendered valueless for the want of markets, and their small hard earning wrested from them by direct taxation, to raise the means necessary to pay the expenses of the war. Why bring upon our country these evils, when our difficulties are susceptible of a peaceful and honorable adjustment? But, say gentlemen, we will take Canada and Mexico. Why should we want Canada or Mexico? If England were to propose ceding Canada to this Government to-morrow, in my



humble judgment it would be unwise to accept the cession. If Mexico were to ask to be annexed to this Union, it would be unwise to grant her prayer. For, if annexed at all, the Mexican States and the Canadas would have to come into the Union upon a footing of perfect equality with the States which now compose the Union. The loyal British subjects of Canada, the whole population of Mexico—Indians, negroes, Spanish Mexicans—all would be adopted as citizens of this Republic, and, as such, would fully participate, according to their numbers, in governing this Union, making its laws, and electing its Presidents. Will such infusions into our political institutions either purify them, or guaranty their perpetuity? It would have been far better for our ancestors quietly to have borne the British yoke; it would have been better for their children to have been born British subjects, than for us to make such an application of our boasted right of self-government as would subject us to the government of British subjects and Mexican barbarians, of whom it is difficult to determine which of the three races is most degraded—the negroes, the Indians, or the Spanish Mexicans. No, sir, Oregon, up to the 49th parallel of latitude, and the province of Upper California, when it can be fairly acquired, is the utmost limit to which this nation ought to go in the acquisition of territory. I have already endeavored to show that Oregon must be ours in a short time, unless that end be defeated by our own folly; and with good management, California may presently be fairly acquired. Within the broad territory which will then be ours—a territory destined, within the lifetime of those now born, to contain more than one hundred millions of inhabitants—a territory stretching from the Atlantic to the Pacific ocean, and from the latitude of 49 degrees north almost to the equator—surely we will have “scope and verge enough” within which to illustrate the capacity of republican government to promote the happiness and elevate and improve the character of man. Upon this broad theatre “let us act well our part,” and we will achieve a nobler destiny for ourselves and our posterity; we will accomplish more by our example for the nations of the earth, than we can possibly achieve and accomplish by wars of aggression for the conquest of territory, or for political propagandism. Much has been said in this debate which inspires a wish to enlarge upon this theme; but I am constrained to be brief. I fear that gentlemen have permitted themselves to become so enamored of the glories of war as to forget the blessings of peace. Whilst I believe that a war with England at the present time would be one of the greatest calamities that could possibly befall this nation, I believe that peace is yearly bringing to it every thing that can make it great and powerful as a nation, and its people prosperous and happy. I believe that peace, which is so rapidly augmenting its population and wealth and power, will presently place this nation in a position of strength so commanding, that no nation upon earth will be so rash as to dispute its rights, and that all the nations of the earth combined will not be able to outrage those rights with impunity. Let not that which is fraught with so many blessings be lightly and unnecessarily imperiled. If it has been already brought into jeopardy by the rashness of the Executive, acting under party obligations imposed by a political convention, let it be made safe by the wisdom and patriotism of Congress; let us not still further imperil it by passing the resolution reported by the Committee on Foreign Affairs without modification. I believe that it ought not to pass in any form at the present time. If it passes this House without modification, surely it will be modified or rejected by the Senate. To doubt these conclusions is to doubt the virtue and intelligence of the American People, as that virtue and intelligence are represented in the Congress of the United States.